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Cuba Cargo Loading Slated In Baltimore

By HELEN DEBICH BENTLEY
(Maritime Editor of The Sun)

Port Everglades, Fla., Dec. 21. — No third of the ransom cargo to be exchanged for the freedom of 1,113 Cubans will be loaded in Baltimore because of the difficulty of transporting the freight to this southern Florida seaport.

This was revealed today as the slow movements of the freight into this area were evidenced here at the waterfront with less than 800 tons arriving here so far although it has been in transit since the wheels began rolling toward the final chapter in the prisoner exchange last Saturday.

Therefore, this morning Raymond Rassenberger, a Washington attorney working with James B. Donovan, New York attorney who has been conducting the negotiations directly with Premier Fidel Castro, called the Maryland Port Authority.

Rassenberger asked — and received — approval from the Maryland Port Authority for free dockage and wharfage of the ship and goods to be placed aboard the second vessel sometime after January 1.

The Broward County Port Authority here has granted the same privileges to the S.S. African Pilot, which was sailed here from Baltimore in the belief it would pick up all the freight here and deliver it in one trip.

However, because of the delays in getting the ransom foodstuffs and medicines here, it is expected that only one third of the amount will be on hand or in the ship when the signal comes that the prisoner exchange has been completed.

Awaiting word
It is believed that as soon as that word is received the S.S.

African Pilot will head immediately for Havana, only fifteen steaming hours from this port. It was because of the nearness of Port Everglades — between Port Lauderdale and Hollywood — to Cuba that it was selected for the loading.

However, the inconvenience of the transportation by rail, truck and plane was not realized fully. Everyone involved in the mass movement — directed by the American Red Cross — was primarily interested in getting the ransom ready as soon as possible and have it close enough to ship out at once, and little thought was given to the land transportation problems.

Only 18 out of 80 railroad cars have reached here so far. The rail movement has been the biggest hold-up, because nearly 70 per cent of the medicines and foodstuffs are coming in by rail, from as far away as California.

The cold weather elsewhere in the country also has helped delay the train movements.

Therefore, Rassenberger, who has been in charge of coordinating the rail movements, apparently decided to have the rest of it go to a better located port.

Joseph L. Stanton, executive director of the Maryland Port Authority, said that warehousing space for the goods will be made available after January 1 at Dundalk Marine Terminal. All charges against trucks and railroads will be waived by the Port Authority because of the charitable efforts being given by all organizations involved in this mammoth movement.

Whether the second ship will be the African Pilot is not known, although it could well be back in Baltimore after January 1 provided it leaves tomorrow or Sunday as is generally believed here.

Air Personnel Alerted

The reports are that the airport personnel at Havana have been alerted that they might have to work over the weekend.

Families living in New York have been flying into this area yesterday and today to be on hand when the prisoners are flown back

to Homestead Air Force Base which has been prepared by the American Red Cross for the return.

In addition to the plane movement, it was reported here that a passenger ship normally going to Nassau has been put on a stand-by basis and certificated by the Coast Guard to carry up to 1,500 persons — more than its usual 1,200.

The initial down-payment cargo to go on the African Pilot will total about \$14,000,000 in value, while the total value of ransom is \$53,000,000. Castro initially had asked for \$62,000,000.

Breakdown Of Goods

Red Cross officials gave this breakdown on the goods going aboard for the down payment:

Vitamin supplements, \$1,900,000; aspirin, rubbing alcohol, petroleum jelly, gastrointestinal drugs, \$375,000; flour, vegetable oil, potato products, multipurpose foods, \$1,035,000; staples, \$150,000; canned corn, \$135,000; supplemental drugs and hospital supplies, \$7,500,000.

When the Baltimore cargo is loaded, there will not be as much confusion reigning as there is. The air of uncertainty prevailing as to whether the negotiations for the exchange actually will be completed have helped add to the confusion. In addition, there has been the difficulties involved in checking in and coordinating all of the cargoes and amounts coming to the pier.

All are being sent in in domestic packings, although this is not expected to create any problem because of the short ride to Cuba.

Port's Major Role

With Baltimore being selected as the port for the rest of the loading, it means that port has played a major role in the entire prisoner exchange program. The African Pilot was there being deactivated when it was made available by Farrell Lines for the errand of mercy. The Committee of American Steamship Lines then said they would pick up the tab.

Most of the men on the ship are Baltimoreans.

Although Rassenberger today asked whether the Baltimore longshoremen would contribute their

services, it was pointed out that they did not here and that none of the individuals involved have worked for free.

The Port Everglades longshoremen did agree to work round-the-clock at straight time. The Maritime Trades Department of the AFL-CIO contributed \$15,000 to pay for their labor.